

<sup>2</sup> Because Plaintiff is acting *pro se*, the documents which he has filed in this case are held to a less stringent standard than if they were prepared by a lawyer and therefore, they are construed liberally. *See Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21, 92 S.Ct. 594, 30 L.Ed.2d 652 (1972).

and asked that this matter be resolved at an administrative level. Plaintiff's reply, "I will not accept a resolution under no circumstances."

(Document No. 1, p. 5.) Plaintiff requests the following relief: (1) "Compensatory damages in the amount of \$60,000;" (2) "Punitive damages in the amount of \$25,000;" and (3) Damages for "[m]ental anguish in the amount of \$10,000." (*Id.*, p. 3.)

### **THE STANDARD**

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the Court is required to screen each case in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. On screening, the Court must recommend dismissal of the case if the complaint is frivolous, malicious or fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. A "frivolous" complaint is one which is based upon an indisputably meritless legal theory. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 118 L.Ed.2d 340 (1992). A "frivolous" claim lacks "an arguable basis either in law or in fact." *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 109 S.Ct. 1827, 1831 - 32, 104 L.Ed.2d 338 (1989). A claim lacks an arguable basis in law when it is "based on an indisputably meritless legal theory." *Id.*, 490 U.S. at 327, 109 S.Ct. at 1833. A claim lacks an arguable basis in fact when it describes "fantastic or delusional scenarios." *Id.*, 490 U.S. at 327 - 328, 109 S.Ct. at 1833. A complaint therefore fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted factually when it appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him or her to relief.

### **ANALYSIS**

The allegations stated in Plaintiff's Complaint asserting violations of his constitutional rights are cognizable under *Bivens v. Six Unknown Named Agents of Fed. Bureau of Narcotics*, 403 U.S. 388, 91 S.Ct. 1999, 29 L.Ed.2d 619 (1971). A *Bivens* action is a judicially created damages remedy

which is designed to vindicate violations of constitutional rights by federal actors. See Bivens v. Six Unknown Named Agents of the Fed. Bureau of Narcotics, 403 U.S. at 395-97, 91 S.Ct. at 2004-05; See also Carlson v. Green, 446 U.S. 14, 100 S.Ct. 1468, 64 L.Ed.2d 15 (1980)(extending Bivens to Eighth Amendment claims); Davis v. Passman, 442 U.S. 228, 239 n. 18, 99 S.Ct. 2264, 2274 n. 18, 60 L.Ed.2d 846 (1979)(extending Bivens to allow citizen's recovery of damages resulting from a federal agent's violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.) A Bivens action is the federal counterpart of an action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. An action for money damages may be brought against federal agents acting under the color of their authority for injuries caused by their unconstitutional conduct. Proof of causation between the official's conduct and the alleged injury is necessary for there to be liability. A plaintiff asserting a claim under Bivens must show the violation of a valid constitutional right by a person acting under color of federal law. The United States Supreme Court has held that an inmate may name a federal officer in an individual capacity as a defendant in alleging an Eighth Amendment constitutional violation pursuant to Bivens. See Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 111 S.Ct. 2321, 115 L.Ed.2d 271 (1991). However, Bivens claims are not actionable against the United States, federal agencies, or public officials acting in their official capacities. See FDIC v. Meyer, 510 U.S. 471, 475, 484-86, 114 S.Ct. 996, 127 L.Ed. 2d 308 (1994); Berger v. Pierce, 933 F.2d 393, 397 (6th Cir. 1991); Reinbold v. Evers, 187 F.3d 348, 355 n. 7 (4th Cir. 1999).

The undersigned views Plaintiff's Complaint as setting forth a claim under the Eighth Amendment. As a general matter, punishments prohibited under the Eighth Amendment include those which "involve the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain." Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 103, 97 S.Ct. 285, 290, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976)(quoting Gregg v. Georgia, 428 U.S. 153, 173, 96 S.Ct. 2909, 2925, 49 L.Ed.2d 859 (1976)). "It not only outlaws excessive sentences but also

protects inmates from inhumane treatment and conditions while imprisoned.” Williams v. Benjamin, 77 F.3d 756, 761 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1996). Under the Eighth Amendment, sentenced prisoners are entitled to “adequate food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care and personal safety.” Wolfish v. Levi, 573 F.2d 118, 125 (2d Cir. 1978), rev’d on other grounds, Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 99 S.Ct. 1861, 60 L.Ed.2d 447 (1979). Thus, sentenced prisoners are entitled to reasonable protection from harm at the hands of fellow inmates and prison officials under the Eighth Amendment. See Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832-34, 114 S.Ct. 1970, 1976-77, 128 L.Ed.2d 811 (1994); Trop v. Dulles, 356 U.S. 86, 102, 78 S.Ct. 590, 598-99, 2 L.Ed.2d 630 (1958); Woodhous v. Commonwealth of Virginia, 487 F.2d 889, 890 (4th Cir. 1973). Inmates’ claims, therefore, that prison officials disregarded specific known risks to their health or safety are analyzed under the deliberate indifference standard of the Eighth Amendment. See Pressly v. Hutto, 816 F.2d 977, 979 (4th Cir. 1987); Moore v. Winebrenner, 927 F.2d 1312, 1316 (4th Cir. 1991) cert. denied, 502 U.S. 828, 112 S.Ct. 97, 116 L.Ed.2d 68 (1991)(Stating that supervisory liability may be imposed where prison supervisors “obdurately,” “wantonly,” or “with deliberate indifference” fail to address a known pervasive risk of harm to an inmate’s health or safety). To establish a violation of the Eighth Amendment in the context of a challenge to conditions of confinement, an inmate must allege (1) a “sufficiently serious” deprivation under an objective standard and (2) that prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference” to the inmate’s health and safety under a subjective standard. Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 297 - 99, 111 S.Ct. 2321, 2323 - 2325, 115 L.Ed.2d 271 (1991). A sufficiently serious deprivation occurs when “a prison official’s act or omission . . . result[s] in the denial of the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” Id. at 298, 111 S.Ct. 2321 (citing Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. at 347, 101 S.Ct. 2392). “In order to establish the imposition of cruel and unusual punishment, a prisoner must prove two elements – that ‘the deprivation of [a] basic

human need was objectively sufficiently serious,’ and that ‘subjectively the officials act[ed] with a sufficiently culpable state of mind.’” Shakka v. Smith, 71 F.3d 162, 166 (4th Cir. 1995)(quoting Strickler v. Waters, 989 F.2d 1375, 1379 (4th Cir. 1993)(quotation omitted)). See also White v. Gregory, 1 F.3d 267, 269 (4th Cir. 1991)(“In *Strickler*, we held that a prisoner must suffer ‘serious or significant physical or mental injury’ in order to be ‘subjected to cruel and unusual punishment within the meaning of the’ Eighth Amendment.”)

Plaintiff contends that Defendant violated his constitutional rights by referring to Plaintiff as a homosexual “with no regard for Plaintiff’s life being threaten by other inmates.” Assuming Plaintiff’s allegation as true, Plaintiff has failed to state a constitutional claim of failure to protect. In order to establish a claim of failure to protect, “the inmate must show that he is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm” and that the prison officials acted with “‘deliberate indifference’ to inmate health or safety.” Farmer, 511 U.S. at 834, 114 S.Ct. at 1977. First, Plaintiff fails to allege that he was incarcerated under conditions imposing a substantial risk of serious harm. Plaintiff does not claim that he was assaulted or that his life was threatened by other inmates or that his safety was jeopardized because of Defendant’s statement.<sup>3</sup> Second, Plaintiff fails to allege facts sufficient to satisfy the subjective component of deliberate indifference. To satisfy the subjective component, Plaintiff must allege that Defendant was consciousness of the risk of harm to him. See Farmer, supra, 511 U.S. at 840, 114 S.Ct. at 1980. Plaintiff, however, fails to allege that Defendant knew of and disregarded an excessive risk to his health or safety. Furthermore, Plaintiff does not indicate that he suffered any serious injury as a result of Defendant’s alleged

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<sup>3</sup> It is unclear as to whether Defendant’s alleged comment was made in the presence of other inmates.

reference to Plaintiff as a homosexual.<sup>4</sup> Plaintiff's claim that Defendant should be liable due to the possibility that Defendant's reference could have resulted in "Plaintiff's life being threaten by other inmates" is insufficient. See Henslee v. Lewis, 153 Fed. Appx. 178 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2005)(Inmate did not state a cognizable claim under Section 1983 when he alleged that jail employee incited other inmates to attack him, but did not contend that any such attack occurred.); Langston v. Fleming, 38 F.3d 1213 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1994)(*unpublished opinion*)(Prisoner failed to state a claim where he merely alleged that guards endangered his life by informing other inmates that he was charged with rape). Finally, the verbal harassment or abuse of an inmate by prison guards, without more, is insufficient to state a constitutional deprivation. Ivey v. Wilson, 832 F.2d 950, 954-55 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1987); also see Lindsey v. O'Connor, 2009 WL 1316087, at \* 1 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. (Pa.))(holding that "[v]erbal harassment of a prisoner, although distasteful, does not violate the Eighth Amendment"); Purcell v. Coughlin, 790 F.2d 263, 265 (2<sup>nd</sup> Cir. 1986)(stating that name-calling does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation); Collins v. Cundy, 603 F.2d 825, 827 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1979)(finding that a sheriff's threats to hang a prisoner were insufficient to state a constitutional deprivation). Based on the foregoing, the undersigned finds that Plaintiff has failed to state a cognizable claim under the Eighth Amendment for which relief can be granted.

### **PROPOSAL AND RECOMMENDATION**

The undersigned therefore hereby respectfully **PROPOSES** that the District Court confirm and accept the foregoing findings and **RECOMMENDS** that the District Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff's

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<sup>4</sup> Plaintiff merely requests damages for his "mental anguish." The undersigned notes that a claim of mental anguish is insufficient to satisfy the Eighth Amendment. See Mickle v. Moore, 174 F.3d 464, 472 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1999)(stating that "depression and anxiety are unfortunate concomitant of incarceration; they do not however, typically constitute the extreme deprivations . . . required to make out a conditions-of-confinement claims").

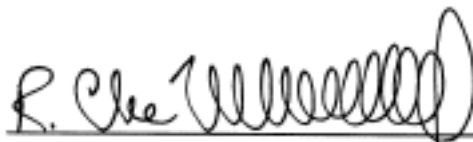
Complaint (Document No. 1.) and remove this matter from the Court's docket.

The Plaintiff is hereby notified that this "Proposed Findings and Recommendation" is hereby **FILED**, and a copy will be submitted to the Honorable United States District Judge Thomas E. Johnston. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 28, United States Code, Section 636(b)(1)(B), and Rule 6(e) and 72(b), Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, the Plaintiff shall have thirteen days from the date of filing of this Proposed Findings and Recommendation within which to file with the Clerk of this Court specific written objections identifying the portions of the Findings and Recommendation to which objection is made and the basis of such objection. Extension of this time period may be granted for good cause.

Failure to file written objections as set forth above shall constitute a waiver of *de novo* review by the District Court and a waiver of appellate review by the Circuit Court of Appeals. Snyder v. Ridenour, 889 F.2d 1363, 1366 (4th Cir. 1989); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140, 155 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 846 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91, 94 (4th Cir. 1984). Copies of such objections shall be served on opposing parties, Judge Johnston and this Magistrate Judge.

The Clerk of this Court is directed to file this "Proposed Findings and Recommendation" and to mail a copy of the same to Plaintiff, who is acting *pro se*.

Date: October 23, 2009.

  
R. Clarke VanDervort  
United States Magistrate Judge